

Though Laugher Ghat in Balaghat district is not very far from where I saw the crimson sunbird pair, I thought this was another case of strayed birds as there were no subsequent records from Madhya Pradesh after 1913. I observed this pair for a month or so in the early morning hours, mainly around *Woodfordia fruticosa* shrubs, the flowers of which were heavily laden with nectar. The *Woodfordia* shrubs stopped flowering by March end, and the sunbirds too disappeared. To my surprise, a male crimson sunbird returned to my garden in February 1993, which coincided with the flowering of *Woodfordia fruticosa*. The bird disappeared in March. Since then, a male crimson sunbird has been visiting my garden almost every year, arriving in February and leaving around the last week of March or April. In 1995, a male arrived in the last week of January and stayed on till the end of March. I have never seen a female of this bird since February 1992. I am not sure whether the male, which has been arriving here is the same individual or not. In February 1999, once again a single male arrived and was going about its

business as usual. What surprised me was that the bird did not return after the *Woodfordia fruticosa* stopped flowering. The bird was seen all through the hot summer months the last sighting being on June 4. The bird was not seen throughout the day, but was seen every evening returning to roost on a small mango tree near my house.

The regular sighting of this bird around Kanha (in winter months) definitely proves that the bird winters here and probably stays till mid-summer before returning to the foothills of the Himalaya where it breeds. Another point is that perhaps it visits more areas in eastern Madhya Pradesh and the range of the bird definitely includes parts of the state other than the one single spot as recorded by D'Abreu in 1913.

October 16, 2000

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### 33. INCUBATION PERIOD OF CRIMSON SUNBIRD *AETHOPYGA SIPARAJA*

The crimson sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja* is a resident and fairly common bird in Konkan, Maharashtra. We see this brilliantly coloured sunbird in its restless flight in gardens, groves and dense forest regularly. According to Ali and Ripley (1999), the nesting period of this bird is April to July, but we have seen a female of this species building a nest on August 12, 2000 in Chiplun, Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra. The nest was built just outside a house wall in an urban area.

The pendant nest was entangled to a coir string, which was tied to a rafter of the house, 96 cm above the ground. This pear-shaped nest was 13 cm long, 7.5 cm wide and with an 8 cm awning over the entrance. The entrance was 3.5 cm in diameter.

We observed the nest a couple of times every day. On August 21 at 0700 hrs, there was only one egg in the nest. Two more eggs were added to the nest in the next two days. The female started incubation only after the third egg was

laid. The male was never seen incubating the eggs.

The first egg hatched on September 6, 2000 at 0700 hrs, while the second hatched at 1400 hrs on the same day. The third egg hatched two days later in the morning. The incubation period for each egg was 16, 15 and 16 days respectively. Both the parents fed the chicks, but most of the work was done by the female, while the male took very little part in it.

All three chicks fledged on September 21, 2000 at 0800 hrs.

March 23, 2001

VISHWAS KATDARE  
ROHAN LOVALEKAR  
AMEYA MODAK  
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ALI, S. & S. DILLON RIPLEY (1999): Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Revised 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Vol 10. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

34. THE SPANISH SPARROW *PASSER HISPANIOLENSIS* FOUND NESTING  
IN HANUMANGARH DISTRICT, RAJASTHAN

On March 26, 1999, we were at Badopal Lake, Hanumangarh district, Rajasthan watching migratory birds on passage. Large mixed flocks of Spanish sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* and house sparrow *Passer domesticus* were conspicuous in the area, mainly around the ripe wheat fields and *Acacia tortilis* plantations along the road. The flocks of Spanish sparrow were exceptionally vocal, calling incessantly and seeming very restless. The whole area was alive with their noisy and restless behaviour.

After watching the birds on the lake in the morning, we retired to the shade of the plantation for lunch, where the Spanish sparrows were calling feverishly. While watching the birds, we noticed a few nests on *Acacia tortilis* trees. A few males in breeding plumage were loudly calling "che che che ..." while displaying with their tails cocked up and moving actively around the nests. Two males were noticed mounting females.

We counted 22 nests on six *Acacia tortilis* trees. These nests were about 6-9 m above the ground, made up of fresh straw collected from the nearby wheat fields. The nests were c. 25-30 cm in diameter, matching the dimensions given

by Gavrilov (1963), and almost spherical in shape. Fresh straw was used on the outer surface of the nests. Most of the nests were on the biggest *Acacia tortilis* tree, located on its terminal branches.

On a second visit to the site on April 18, 1999, ten more nests were found. Two males were displaying with their tails cocked up, and six males were observed carrying some downy material (probably cotton from the nearby fields) and entering the nests.

The Spanish sparrow is a winter visitor to the northwestern part of the Subcontinent (Ali and Ripley 1987; Roberts 1992). It breeds extraliminally in Central Asia westwards to the Caucasus and eastwards throughout Kazakhstan. The birds start the return flight from their winter quarters to the native areas about the beginning of March. The establishment of colonies in breeding areas usually takes place a few days after the beginning of mass arrivals, during the middle or end of May. The birds usually nest in very large colonies (Gavrilov 1963). In contrast, the nesting colony at Badopal was very small and established as early as March.

The sparrow nests almost exclusively in cultivated areas, living in the proximity of man.